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SUBJECT: UNHCR DISCUSSES RESETTLEMENT, KRISAN CAMP,
REPATRIATION, AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR COTE D'IVOIRE

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: During their initial courtesy call, Ambassador Bridgewater and Acting UNHCR Representative Luc Stevens discussed resettlement issues, the brewing unrest at Krisan Camp, the possible repatriation of Togolese refugees, and contingency planning for Cote d'Ivoire. Stevens said the hub would refer 700 refugees over the next two months, but did not offer any numbers from among the Ghana refugee population. He advised that 600 refugees from Krisan Camp were still camped at the Ghanaian/Ivoirian border, demanding resettlement on the basis of false information, but apparently tiring of their predicament. Stevens agreed that the GOT's calls for assistance with repatriation of Togolese refugees was premature. Finally, he discussed the possible use of three reception centers in case large numbers of TCN's, refugees, and Ghanaians had to flee to Ghana from Cote d'Ivoire. END SUMMARY.

Resettlement: Still Too Little, Too Late

2. (U) Acting UNHCR Representative Luc Stevens called on Ambassador Bridgewater on December 4, with DCM Jerry Lanier and Ref Coord Nate Bluhm present. When asked directly about the declining resettlement activity in the region, Stevens proffered some good news: the hub estimated that five branch offices would be submitting referrals for another 700 refugees between now and December 31. These numbers would come from CAR, Cameroon, Gabon, and Nigeria (about 100 from each location), and from Sierra Leone (300).

3. (SBU) On the Sudanese, Stevens said the Minister of the Interior (MOI) was generating confusion by telling the press they would either be resettled or moved to a third country. UNHCR was reluctant to refer them for resettlement at this time because of the possible pull factor, and no other country had agreed to accept them on an interim basis. Nevertheless, Stevens acknowledged that High Commissioner Guterres had told his office to consider resettlement as a durable solution for the Sudanese, an order he took seriously. Stevens noted that Sudanese continue to trickle into Ghana at the rate of five to ten per week. It was ironic that after moving 250 Sudanese from Central Accra to Krisan Camp in August, the MOI now had to contend with them in his own backyard, since he represented the nearby city of Takoradi in parliament.

Consternation in Krisan

4. (SBU) The MOI's inaccurate public pronouncements on the Sudanese were triggering resentment at Krisan Camp, home to a polyglot community of 2,000 Sudanese, Togolese, Ivoirians, Rwandans, and others. The Togolese in this camp arrived in Ghana as early as 1993 and believe they should be given consideration for resettlement before the Sudanese. Stevens reminded us that resettlement is based on need, not nationality. Other refugees heard that enrollment in a vocational training program would be tantamount to local integration and thus disqualify them for resettlement. Emotions came to a head on November 1, when Stevens tried to visit the Camp for the first time. He turned back after learning that refugees had packed their bags in the expectation that UNHCR would transport them to Accra's international airport for immediate resettlement. Still other rumors circulated that the UNHCR offices in Ghana would be closed and all assistance would cease. Some 600 angry refugees thus began the long, 40-mile walk to the Ghanaian/Ivoirian border, where they demanded entry into Cote d'Ivoire. Some succeeded in contacting RFI and BBC to complain of the UNHCR's alleged mistreatment of them. Bewildered border officials eventually decided not to allow the refugees to cross the border, since there was no legal basis for admitting them.

The Togolese

5. (SBU) Stevens shared that he had been in touch with the GOT's Commissioner for Repatriation, who unconvincingly stated that everything was now fine in Togo and it was time

to begin repatriating the refugees. Stevens reminded him that repatriation had to be voluntary, and the 11,900 recently arrived refugees in the Volta Region were in no mood to return home yet. Ref Coord pointed out that Ghana is home to another 4,000 Togolese who fled during unrest in the 1990's. While there may be conceptually an "ideal" time for resettlement to begin, waiting for "perfection" should not serve as a pretext for inaction. Someone may have missed the boat by not resettling this group earlier; now we face the prospect that resettling the older caseload would unsettle the new arrivals in the Volta Region. Stevens agreed to check into unconfirmed reports that the older Togolese caseload had already been referred for resettlement years ago but had been rejected.

Contingency Planning for Cote d'Ivoire

16. (SBU) Contingency plans had been drafted in case events turned sour in Cote d'Ivoire, Stevens said. The GOG had identified three possible reception centers located near the Ivoirian border and the various players had drafted emergency budgets for sharing among potential donors. UNHCR would not issue an appeal until such time as refugee flows actually began; otherwise, the Ivoirians could think that UNHCR had already concluded that violence was inevitable. The UN's OCHA office in Dakar was taking the lead in coordinating regional contingency planning.

Comment

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Stevens was forthright and appeared to be well versed in refugee issues, despite having become Acting Representative only one month ago. The 700 submissions for resettlement Stevens promised would bring the regional UNHCR total to approximately 2,400 P-1's for this calendar year, still short of the 3,000 to which Geneva committed when it accepted five PRM-funded resettlement positions. Still, the 700 anticipated over the next two months would restore resettlement activity to an acceptable level, following the dismal months of September and October, when UNHCR referred only 25 cases. As for the Sudanese, despite their exemplary behavior, the MOI will continue to regard them as a thorn in his side. We hope UNHCR will eventually refer most of the vulnerable Sudanese to the U.S. Resettlement Program, an action that would please both the GOG and UNHCR's largest donor. We will continue to monitor the stand-off at the Ivoirian border; by most accounts, the refugees are tiring of this publicity stunt and many have already asked for transportation back to Krisan. END COMMENT.
BRIDGEWATER